Policy & Learning
Workgroup Planning Meeting

EVENT SUMMARY
Online via Zoom
Thursday, July 22, 2021 | 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Workgroup Co-Chairs
Emily Janoch | Director, Knowledge Management and Learning, CARE USA
Lane Pollack | Senior Learning Advisor, Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning, USAID

Event Description

What are your biggest questions in Policy and Learning? What expertise and examples do you have to share with the international development community? In the last year, we’ve talked about how leaders make decisions, done a peer assist on “Lessons Unlearned,” and hosted a session on collective learning and how to think about learning as a social activity. Now we’re planning for what events to host in the coming year, and we’d love your feedback, ideas, and enthusiasm. Participants joined to talk about what topics they’d like to cover, what goals they hoped to accomplish, and what formats are useful for them. They also spent time in small groups connecting, networking, and brainstorming.
I. Welcome and Introduction
Workgroup Co-Chairs Emily Janoch (Care USA) and Lane Pollack (USAID) opened the event by introducing themselves to the group. After introductions from participants, the Co-Chairs provided a recap of events from the previous fiscal year, including How Decisions Get Made, Lessons Unlearned, and Collective Learning and Networks. They also covered prior feedback they had received from Policy & Learning Workgroup Members:

i. Allow more time in Breakout Groups to get more substance out of the conversation and increase interactions.
ii. Set aside time for a Q&A session, especially before panels.
iii. Opt for longer sessions of 90-120 minutes instead of 85 minutes.
iv. Increase access to online resources that are mentioned in meetings by providing links.

II. Breakout Groups, Part 1: Brainstorm
The Co-Chairs then randomly assigned participants to Breakout Groups in order to brainstorm and prioritize their best ideas for upcoming Policy & Learning Workgroup events.

Breakout Group 1
The first topic that was emphasized during the brainstorm session was equity in global health – by creating partnerships, it is easier to level the playing field and create better learning environments. Another focus was fostering conditions that allow for more general access and localization. One attendee also brought up the idea of articulating and measuring the value of learning work, perhaps by hearing from different organizations to understand how learning is implemented at every level.

The use of evidence was also discussed heavily during this session. Evidence practices, such as open data policies, were mentioned in relation to the opportunities they can create for USAID and partner implementation. Some participants highlighted how the definition of “good evidence” can change depending on context, such as the intended audience, inclusivity, and more.

Breakout Group 2
The discussion began on the topic of COVID-19 and how the end of the pandemic is going to affect the transition back to working in-person. Post-COVID hybrid models of learning have a lot to offer, including the creation of a blended space that allows people to work both in-person and remotely. Several participants brought up the importance of trust-building and how that may look different in the near future. They all emphasized that a lack of trust is a problem that must be addressed proactively.

Breakout Group 3
The group began by discussing the application of CLA (Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting) to specific organizations and institutions at a policy level. Participants felt that proper integration and implementation of CLA would allow for a more cohesive program cycle.

Next, the focus shifted to decolonization. One attendee asked about the best way to transfer knowledge to local organizations since this practice can often be just as valuable as money and other resources. Another attendee also wondered about the best practices for decolonization at larger organizations, which led the discussion to learning.
how to spend when scaling up projects.

Another topic of interest was on the difference between tech vs operations/management. Some participants highlighted the difficulty of procurement and capacity building, which is why it is so important to make sure both sides of a project are in sync to ensure success.

III. Breakout Groups Part 2: Initial Prioritization
The participants returned to the Main Room and briefly shared their ideas. Then, the Breakout Groups were randomly shuffled so participants could start deciding how to prioritize the ideas they brainstormed.

Breakout Group 1
Many attendees voiced that they feel overwhelmed by webinars and are looking for alternative methods to engage with the international development community. Suggestions from participants included a happy hour, a “writeshop”, or even just shorter webinars. To ensure equity and inclusivity in learning methods, a mix of in-person and virtual was agreed to be the best option.

Networking has gained even more importance over the pandemic. Some attendees noted that while online events help overcome geographic restraints, the settings may not always encourage the human connection that allows people to network successfully. Thus, the future of networking should take the form of in-person events that utilize a hybrid set of tools to help facilitate connections.

Breakout Group 2
Collaborative tools were the main focus of this session. Whether through Google Docs, LinkedIn, or Mural/Miro, attendees emphasized the importance of co-creation and shared outputs as a way to link people together even after a webinar has ended. In the new hybrid environment, building trust will require changes in collaboration tactics.

Breakout Group 3
Similarly, this breakout room discussed a return to in-person events with a larger emphasis on interaction and discussion among participants rather than always bringing in panelists. One of the main concerns that arose was keeping people engaged in the face of obstacles like different time zones, oversaturation of information, and lack of engagement. Attendees agreed that the best resolution was to intentionally allot time at the end of meetings to discuss action items and establish clear expectations.

IV. Next Steps
Based on the discussion, the Workgroup Co-Chairs will compile the ideas from the meeting and coordinate with SID-W staff to send it out to members of the Workgroup so they can all weigh in on upcoming events to be rolled out in the coming year.